Curating East Africa: A Platform and Process for Location-based Storytelling in the Developing World

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J. Mark Souther, Meshack Owino, and Erin J. Bell

Cleveland State University

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"Curating East Africa: A Platform and Process for Location-based Storytelling in the Developing World" (September 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018) was funded by a generous NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant. The project is part of an ongoing collaboration between Cleveland State University (Cleveland, Ohio) and Maseno University (Kisumu, Kenya) that has produced a first-of-its-kind, collaboratively curated, mobile-first online history of a major African city through a unique partnership and the thoughtful development of a WordPress plugin that delivers the robust narrative-building capacity of Curatescape with respect for the kinds of devices owned by a growing segment of the African public and the technological constraints posed by places they inhabit. This white paper documents the project's activities, accomplishments, evaluation, impact, and next steps. Along the way, it offers reflections on process that may be useful to others contemplating similar work.

Background

"Curating East Africa" grew out of more than a decade of practice in location-based digital history by the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities (CPHDH) at Cleveland State University. The most recognized product of this work has been Curatescape, a web and mobile framework for curating location-based humanities content that emerged from a 2011 NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant, "Mobile Historical." Curatescape used the pioneering *Cleveland Historical* as a template to create a modifiable codebase that could be readily adopted for similar projects elsewhere. Built atop the Omeka content management system, Curatescape is now a broadly recognized toolset that is used across North America and in a smaller number of instances on other continents. Five years ago, the current project team embarked on a new effort to explore how Curatescape might be optimized for use in developing world contexts. A 2014 NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant, "Curating Kisumu: Adapting Mobile Humanities Interpretation in East Africa," launched our collaboration with the Department of History and Archeology at Maseno University. During that grant period and in the 2016-17 interim between it and the "Curating East Africa" grant's launch, we collaboratively researched and curated 32 location-based, illustrated narratives that appeared on a standard Curatescape website while we investigated and developed plans for optimizing the project for users in Kenya and in some settings.

Activities

The "Curating East Africa" grant supported development of the Curatescape plugin for WordPress by lead developer Erin Bell. The single plugin added Stories and Tours as new content types in WordPress, and the overall toolset provided a streamlined workflow, and improved functionality for publishing location-based content. Bell also created a custom theme tailored to conserve data usage, with dramatic reductions in page size, HTTP requests per page, and clicks and page loads per story. Unlike in Curatescape on Omeka, the plugin permits users to build a new story using a single tab and with a single save rather than five tabs, page reloads, and saves. Moreover, the administrative interface is more intuitive in that users see all Curatescape story components on a single page, most of them in sequential order as they will appear in the public view: title, narrative, tags, subjects, subtitle, lede, evidentiary media files, location details, and related resources. Unlike in Curatescape for Omeka, which requires creating stories as compound objects, WordPress handles images in a way that permits their reuse across multiple stories by simply searching the Media Gallery. WordPress also obviates our prior practice of manually resizing all images to save on data usage by automating this process. In addition, Bell added a shortcode method for manually placing media content and maps which permits greater flexibility and interpretive license by enabling users to insert components anywhere in a story rather than always in dedicated sections following the body of the text. During the process of building the plugin, we discovered an existing WordPress theme, *Sepal*

and Seed, that was developed expressly for developing-world contexts. Bell used both code and lessons from *Sepal and Seed* as a foundation for addressing the Kisumu project's specific needs. The resulting *Curating Kisumu* theme is much-improved over *Sepal and Seed* in terms of visual design and functionality and, with the addition of aggressive server-side caching and other optimizations, even leaner in terms of data consumption.[1]

The grant also supported additional content creation for *MaCleKi,* the Kisumu, Kenya-based pilot of the new plugin.[2] During the fall 2017 semester, student research teams composed of students at Maseno and CSU curated location-based stories. In December the project team migrated all content from the preexisting Omeka-based site to the new WordPress site. In January 2018, project directors Mark Souther and Meshack Owino traveled to Kisumu to meet with project partners and their students, conduct planning meetings and a platform training workshop, engage existing and prospective community stakeholders, collect primary materials, and photo-document significant sites in the Kisumu area. During our week in Kisumu, we met with Daniel arap Mitei, Coordinator of Antiquities, Sites & Monuments for the Western Region of the National Museums of Kenya, Phoebe Awiti, Curator of National Museums of Kenya's Kisumu Museum, other representatives of Kisumu Museum, Dr. John Obiero Ogone, Minister of Education, ICT & Human Resources Development in the County Government of Kisumu, Daniel Okutah, Assistant City Manager for the City of Kisumu, as well as a number of community stakeholders at local schools, religious institutions, industrial firms, and heritage sites. In the spring semester, content development continued, and Bell made theme and plugin refinements.

In both fall 2017 and spring 2018, two nationwide public university faculty strikes disrupted classes at Maseno. The first strike delayed completion of new content by one month, while the second strike forced the project team to suspend collaboration between students at our respective universities. During the strike, we were fortunate to be able to turn to our contacts at the Kisumu Museum to support content creation by CSU students. We provided honoraria from CPHDH funds to compensate their contributions and requested an extension of the grant period from August 31 to December 31 so that our Maseno partners could fulfill all responsibilities under the grant. In fall 2018, Maseno resumed full participation, but we decided to invite the continued involvement of Kisumu Museum staff in the project, supported again by CPHDH funds.

Publicity during and since the close of the grant period consisted of some university promotion, updates and sharing of new content via our social media channels, conference presentations, and scholarly publications. Our social media presence enabled us to present faces of the project apart from the website itself. We will present the project at the Africa Conference at the University of Texas-Austin and as part of the HSOC Spring Speaker Series at Georgia Tech in spring 2019. We also published an essay for *Parameters*, the website of the Social Science Research Council, and have another article accepted for the scholarly methodological journal *History in Africa* (published by Cambridge University Press).[3] Finally, we created the *Kisumu Archive*, an Omeka-based collection of

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[1] "Wordpress for the Developing World and Low Bandwidth Connections," *Paul Grieselhuber: Design, Development, and Digital Strategy*, September 16, 2016, https://www.paulgrieselhuber.com/sepal-and-seed-wordpress-for-the-developing-world/.

[2] *MaCleKi*, https://macleki.org.

[3] Meshack Owino and J. M. Souther, "MaCleKi: Engaging the African Public in Their History, One Story at a Time," *Parameters*, December 3, 2018, https://parameters.ssrc.org/2018/12/macleki-engaging-the-african-public-in-their-history-one-story-at-a-time/.

nearly 1,000 contemporary and historical photos of Kisumu and the surrounding Nyanza region of Kenya developed during the course of the project since its inception.[4]

Accomplishments

The project team accomplished all major goals set forth in our proposal. First, we developed the working beta of Curatescape for WordPress on schedule and within budget. Thanks to invaluable feedback in our evaluations, we made important refinements in fall 2018 and have identified additional changes and next steps and even begun to undertake some of these (as explained in the concluding section). The result is what we think is an engaging, attractive, user-friendly, and sustainable mobile-first project site. Despite unforeseen nationwide university strikes that slowed our progress at times, we completed 22 new *MaCleKi* stories in three semesters. While we did not state exact goals for the number of stories that would be added, we might have reasonably expected to add around 16 stories in the originally intended two-semester grant period based on previous experience. The project engaged a total of 76 students from both universities during this grant, bringing the total number of student participants since the project's inception to more than 200. The project succeeded in engaging faculty and students at Maseno University, although it must be acknowledged that the day-to-day challenges and distractions experienced by Maseno faculty and students (especially the aforementioned national strikes but also the unrest that accompanied a tumultuous Kenyan national election season in 2017) diminished the quality of the collaboration in comparison to our previous experience together.[5] These challenges hindered timely communication and, in the case of spring 2018, even forced a hiatus in our collaboration. With a grant extension, perseverance, and the demonstrated interest of our partners, we were able to meet our goals, but the challenges certainly raise the question whether such a project can flourish as an ongoing collaboration, particularly in periods when funding is not available. However, our efforts to broaden the cast of stakeholders give us hope that, in the future, the content development aspect of this project might evolve into one in which multiple interests collaborate, thereby widening participation and spreading responsibilities. We are especially encouraged by the quality of work by those at the Kisumu Museum. The museum is a logical partner institution that can clearly contribute to and benefit from this project.

Audiences

"Curating East Africa" has reached audiences worldwide through the *MaCleKi* website and associated social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).[6] This engagement began with the debut of *MaCleKi* in spring 2015 and on social media in fall 2015. The primary intended audience includes people in Kenya and East Africa ranging from youths to elders. According to Google Analytics, the project website has drawn nearly 20,000 page views by some 10,000 users in the most recent six-month period, of whom 69% were from three East African countries (Kenya 66%, Tanzania 2%, Uganda 1%). The United States and United Kingdom accounted for 10% and 9%,

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[4] *Kisumu Archive*, http://archive.macleki.org.

[5] For insight on the challenges surrounding Kisumu's place at the heart of opposition politics during each national election cycle, see Eyder Peralta, "In Kenya, Much of the Election Chaos and Violence Stems from Tribal Divisions," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, October 24, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559889613/in-kenya-much-of-the-election-chaos-and-violence-stems-from-tribal-divisions. A useful summary of the chronic problem with university strikes in Kenya, see "What Kenya Needs to Do to Stop University Strike Cycle," *Star* (Nairobi), April 17, 2018, https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018/04/17/what-kenya-needs-to-do-to-stop-university-strike-cycle_c1744925.

[6] *Curating Kisumu (@curatingkisumu) | Twitter*, https://twitter.com/curatingkisumu; *Curating Kisumu – Home | Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/curatingkisumu/; *Curating Kisumu (@curating_kisumu) • Instagram photos and videos*, https://www.instagram.com/curating_kisumu.

respectively. With the increasing saturation of mobile device ownership in this region, the project's potential audience grows with each passing day and is limited primarily by factors such as the cost of data and access to either a cellular signal or WiFi.[7]

The project team used three methods to gauge audience response to the project. These included provision of a third-party (Disqus) comments forum following each *MaCleKi* story, comments on social media platforms, and questionnaires distributed by the Kisumu Museum. Disqus offered little, as expected. Although users occasionally leave a comment on the project site itself, they usually prefer to engage with content on a preferred social media platform, where they bring the content into their own space to curate it further because they understand that their own social and professional circles will be able to see it there. Social media provided occasional, anecdotal evidence of how our audiences have reacted to the project. The project's Twitter account has 483 followers, 73% of whom reside in Kenya, according to Twitter Analytics. Over the most recent six months, tweets received an average of 7 retweets and 11 likes. (One tweet in February 2019, in which we highlighted the overall project, was retweeted more than two-dozen times and received nearly 50 likes.) We also maintain Facebook and Instagram accounts but have been less active on these platforms. Although social media followers may rarely click through to read the associated content on *MaCleKi*, we have come to view social media channels simply as other digital facets of the project. When viewed in this way, *MaCleKi* engages in multiple places with a varying audience, meeting people wherever they are and inviting them to interact with project content and with us. We offer below some anecdotal evidence of the nature of comments received on Twitter and Facebook:

- Oneka Arika on Twitter (2/20/19), responding to a tweet about the Kisumu Cotton Mills story: "@AnyangNyongo when are we reviving this? when Nigeria and Ghana used to shop for their kitenges in Kenya." [Ayang Nyongo is the Governor of Kisumu County. A kitenge is an African fabric similar to a sarong and worn either as a dress or a headscarf.]
- Cookswell Jikos on Twitter (2/10/19), responding to a tweet announcing our four theme-based tours: "very cool! Please could you do a write and photo a bit on the history of charcoal use there?" [Until very recently, charcoal was almost exclusively used in cooking in this region, with significant negative impacts on the environment.]
- Rajni Patel on Facebook (9/21/18), responding to a posted 1930s aerial photo of Kisumu: "I can clearly see the rows of Railway Quarters i grew up in middle 1950 ies."
- Monica Guya on Twitter (9/10/18), responding to a tweeted 1930s photo of a street scene in Kisumu from the project's associated Omeka photo archive: "Where is the Kisumujournalists archives located?" Our reply: "It is not a physical archive but a digital one. It is connected to the MaCleKi project, a collaboration between Maseno and Cleveland State University in the US." Her reply: "Where does MaCleKi get the images?" Our reply: "They are mostly photographed by permission at local sites, institutions, museums, etc., by students

[7] Our "Curating Kisumu" white paper detailed the technological landscape of East Africa as of 2015. See J. Mark Souther, Meshack Owino, and Erin J. Bell, "Adapting Mobile Humanities Interpretation in East Africa," NEH White Paper, March 15, 2016, https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx?f=1&gn=HD-51912-14. Since that time, Kenya has continued to lead the African continent in Internet usage. As of the end of 2017 (the most recent data available), 85% of Kenyans were online, up from just under 70% two years earlier. Smartphone adoption across sub-Saharan Africa continues to expand, reaching 34% of the population in 2017, but also continues to lag behind the average for all developing nations (55%). See *Internet World Stats*, http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm, and GSMA Intelligence, *The Mobile Economy: Sub-Saharan Africa 2018*, https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/sub-saharan-africa/, esp. pp. 12, 24.

and faculty. For example, some come from Kisumu Museum and the Oginga homestead near Bondo. Photos at schools and churches by permission of leaders."

- Ajulu Apiyo, MBA, MSc AIT on Twitter (4/16/18), responding to a tweet that reads "In Luo tradition, Kit Mikayi is where the first woman lived. In fact, the name Kit Mikayi is a Dholuo name that means 'the stones of the first wife.'": "But needs lotsa upgrading.."
- HumanCondition on Twitter (5/16/18), responding to a tweet about Ambrose Ofafa Memorial Building that presents the most commonly cited cause of death of Ofafa, a Kenyan nationalist politician—fatal injuries sustained in an alleged highway robbery in Nairobi in 1953: "Check back on your history. Ofafa was assassinated by Mau Mau terrorists over his advocacy for peaceful non-violence in the clamour for independence."
- Okore Luther MK on Twitter (2/15/18), responding to a tweet of a historic 1926 etching of Maseno National School from a *MaCleKi* story about the same: "The piece has factual inconsistencies that need review" [Clearly he was responding to the linked essay. We made some modest revisions that hopefully answered his concerns.]
- Cavine Ouma on Twitter (2/14/18), responding to a tweet of our story about Usoma Beach: "I love what you're doing. [K]eep up the good work"
- James Oloo on Twitter (2/3/18), responding to a tweet in which we asked if anyone remembered the location of the old Coca-Cola bottling plant in Kisumu: "I remember Equator Bottlers located somewhere on Achieng' Oneko Road, in the same strip mall as Wimpy Bakery on one side, and Casino on the other #Kisumu"

Although these are admittedly mere glimpses, they demonstrate a range of responses: gratitude, suggestions for new content, personal reminiscences, questions about sources, politicized commentaries, challenges to interpretation, and recommendations for revision. The responses suggest that Kenyan readers are interested in engaging with their history and with place, matters we discuss in greater detail in our essay in *Parameters*. In short, Africans engage in public history in much the same way as anyone else.

In addition to examining social media responses, we made an effort to assess public impressions by working with Phoebe Awiti, curator of the Kisumu Museum, who distributed questionnaires to museum visitors in fall 2018. Respondents were asked to view *MaCleKi* on their phones and then answer some open-ended questions. Fifty-four people responded. Of these, 21 were male, 23 female, and 10 did not identify. Their age range was 18–50 and averaged 28 years old. Prior to their museum visit, 83% had never heard of *MaCleKi*. Of the 17% who had heard of the website, just under half had used it prior to their visit. These individuals averaged 22 years old, significantly younger than the average, although the small *n* makes this statistic rather limited in its importance. Of the 54 respondents, 44 (81%) indicated that they would be "very likely" to share the website with friends or family. Another seven (13%) would be "somewhat likely." In all, then, 94% of respondents reported some likelihood of sharing the website with others. The three "very unlikely" responses are of dubious significance because all were positive in their comments elsewhere. The general impression from the questionnaires is that these members of the public were favorably impressed with the website. However, it is unclear whether most of them spent much time before rendering their opinions. The strongest indication is that the vast majority, when asked which story most captured their interest, cited one of the then-recently added stories focusing on tradition Luo culture. It is possible to read this enthusiasm as a product of place: Kisumu is effectively the "capital" of the Luo people, and most of the human history (as opposed to natural history) depicted at the Kisumu Museum is that of the Luo. However, it is also possible that most only looked

through the first few most recently published stories, thereby failing to see the range of stories. (We have since changed this organization of content on the landing page, a response to suggestions by multiple evaluators.) It is worth noting that several respondents provided critiques that showed more than a superficial engagement with *MaCleKi*. In echo of one Twitter reader's comment about alleged governmental mismanagement of the Kit Mikayi heritage site, one of our respondents noted that our "The Many Uses of Kit Mikayi" story does not comment on problems of access to the site. Another respondent noticed that our story on Kisumu Girls High School does not mention the newest principal of the school. Yet another thought our story on Mega City Mall places too much attention on the broader connection to international trade between South Africa and Kenya at the expense of other themes.

Evaluation

Our evaluation phase, which included the questionnaire responses summarized above, occurred during fall semester and was completed in December. Our three project evaluators, Eric Aseka (Africa Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya), Peter Ndege (Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya), and Emmanuel Temu (University of Dodoma, Dodoma, Tanzania), reviewed the project's concept, content, and front-end user experience. We also obtained evaluations from our three project advisors, Jennifer Hart (Wayne State University), Gregory H. Maddox (Texas Southern University), and Angel David Nieves (San Diego State University). Each of them reviewed and evaluated the concept, content, and both front-end and back-end of the website. Although only two of the six have digital humanities expertise, all are scholars of African history. All evaluators and advisors were highly positive in their assessments but also offered critiques that will help us going forward, particularly with regard to content and community engagement. In addition, our project partners Gordon Obote Magaga and Benard Busaka (Maseno University) prepared a joint report on their involvement in the project and collected project questionnaires completed by 43 students who were involved in the project from 2016 to 2018. Beyond the above individuals, all named in the grant, Phoebe Awiti and 12 members of the Kisumu Museum staff completed surveys that we developed. We summarize and quote examples of comments from the evaluations, reports, and questionnaires below and will archive the full materials per the data management plan.

Our three project evaluators, all of them professors in East Africa, were pleased with the project concept and content. Temu characterizes *MaCleKi* as "a virtual museum" that documents "the social history and heritage" of Kisumu and is relevant to heritage preservation. Aseka calls *MaCleKi* a collection of "high quality" stories "guided by great historical acumen and skill." He also acknowledges that the project "is vital with catalyzing cultural awareness among the various readers of these histories in a country characterized by a high tendency of cultural silo mentality that has heretofore become a dangerous breeding ground of tribalism across the nation-state of Kenya." It is worth noting that Aseka's emphasis on the project as one to document Luo heritage may be because (at the time of his evaluation) the most recent stories (and therefore the ones that were presented first on the landing page) were about Luo customs. Ndege's evaluation is similarly positive. He posits that *MaCleKi*, "developed within the wider context of public history," offers "an answer to questions of which and whose past should be studied, who should be involved in making these decisions, and who should tell stories about the past that are particularly important given the "impacts of globalization." He finds the stories appropriately pitched to engage a wider readership outside the academy. They are, Ndege quips, "not loaded with the jargon of professional historians who usually talk to themselves." He is also impressed by the pedagogical value of the concept: "The fact that these stories are told by undergraduate history students implies that the project has

commenced training them in developing ideas into research topics and proceeding to research and write about them." The students, he observes, are "involved, at an early stage of their academic careers, in the widening of frontiers of history" and "trained to appreciate the fact that knowledge production in history is at best a collaborative and interactive process among scholars and members of the public." By serving as informants and commenting on stories, members of the public become partial "owners" of the stories. He contrasts this with the recent history of Kisumu by Kenya's pre-eminent historian Bethwell Allan Ogot, which as a result of being published by a small Kisumu-based press "will probably not be found in most university libraries around the world for a long time."[8] He concludes that digital humanities projects like *MaCleKi* represent "the most effective strategy … to facilitate the production and dissemination of historical knowledge" in East Africa.

Our three project advisors were, similarly, mostly favorable in their assessments of the importance of the project from a conceptual and content standpoint. Maddox applauds the fact that the student researchers "have not shied away from contentious issues in Kenya's and the region's history." Their curated stories offer "a fresh take on many important issues" and will "serve as an invaluable aid for teaching about the history of Kenya and the region." Echoing Maddox, Hart calls the project a "new resource for academics, teachers, and the general community," one that "will certainly inspire or generate other related projects as word spreads." She also appreciates that the project "thinks carefully about accessibility, collaboration, and community." Indeed, she comments, "collaboration is at the core of the project," a fact that is clearly discernible in the authorship of the stories. Likewise, Nieves finds the project "hugely important for raising awareness about historic sites in cities across eastern and southern Africa." It is, he observes, "exemplary of … publicly engaged digital scholarship."

We also asked the three project advisors to evaluate the administrative back-end of the website. Here, too, their comments were positive. Maddox calls the interface "attractive" and "straight forward" and reported that he was easily able to add content in a test draft. Hart agrees, calling the platform as "extremely user friendly" and "intuitive" and pointing out that story-level content is separated into "clearly labeled boxes." She notes that the Curatescape story fields "make more explicit options that often require a bit of digging" in WordPress. She writes that the "most used" tags are useful because they "encourage users to build up and think about connections between new and existing stories." Echoing Maddox and Hart, Nieves calls the admin site "intuitive and easy to use."

Our project advisors also had some critiques. One of these was that some of the stories on the site are not as rigorously place-based as they might be. Indeed, in some cases, we might have pushed students to make a clearer claim about the place basis of their stories, and this is a critique we will carry forward in future story development. The most substantive critique concerns the front-end user experience. A universal complaint was that the website's landing page did not do enough to create a clear understanding of project themes and how individual stories were part of a greater whole. At the time, our layout simply listed the three most recently published stories, leaving users to click below to view more stories or turn to the top menu to go to either a full list of stories in reverse chronologically order of publication or a list of tours that each combined several stories under the rubric of one or another theme such as "Roads, Railroads, and Ports." Our advisors

[8] Bethwell A. Ogot, *Kisumu City, 1901-2001: From an Inland Port to First Millennium City* (Kisumu, Kenya: Anyange Press Ltd., 2016). It is worth noting that Ogot's book cites multiple *MaCleKi* stories and in one instance uses a student-captured photo from the website as a book illustration.

wished for a less "disjointed" and more "guided approach." They steered us toward rethinking a Tour/Story hierarchy and connection, particular their presentation. Near the close of the grant, we responded to this critique by making a major organizational change on the *MaCleKi* landing page. Bell redesigned the landing page so that tours are presented in attractive panes, each with a hero image, title, and the first three stories in each tour followed by a "View All" button. Not only does this suggest to users a thematic approach to content, it also allows us to feature more stories on the landing page by manipulating the order of those stories on the administrative side in each tour. Thus, rather than seeing the three most recent stories, which at times might not convey a very clear sense of the range of content on the overall site, users are more likely to gain insight into the project. In addition, a newly added subject and tag cloud (color coded with green for subjects and maize for tags) further enhances users' understanding of themes and topics to explore. (See Appendix A.) We offset the added weight (in kilobytes) of this enhancement by turning off map interactivity in favor of a static map that, when clicked, takes users to a dynamic map. (See Appendix B.)

All of our advisors agree that the project's platform and process for location-based storytelling has potential for wider adoption in developing-world contexts. Suggestions included finding ways to link the project to K-12 and university classrooms in Kenya and connect with UNESCO, Global Heritage Fund, African World Heritage Fund, and tourism conferences in Africa. Indeed, specific location-based historical content is this region is severely lacking, although it must be noted that our content probably lends itself better to university teaching than for younger students. Drawing on his long experience working with universities, museums, and communities in Tanzania, Maddox continues to see Tanzania as an excellent place for a project of this type, which might be adopted by the national museums in Tanzania and on Zanzibar, both of which manage "extensive collections of heritage sites." Three universities in Tanzania (University of Dar es Salaam, University of Dodoma, and University of Zanzibar) have heritage management components in their history programs and would be good candidates as partners. Maddox notes that students at Dodoma already create a museum exhibit in one of their courses, so adding a digital component would be very attractive. As he points out, however, language is another issue: Tanzania would need both Kiswahili and English support. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. As we investigated the potential to develop for multilingual use, we became less sanguine about the prospects. Like Omeka and other well-known open-source content management systems, WordPress lacks built-in support for multilingual publishing. While there are a number of third-party "plugin" extensions that add this capability, none has emerged as a de facto standard. There is significant risk in building on top of plugins whose origin, quality, and continued support are unclear. We also have concerns about the Tanzanian government's forays into limiting free speech and free press in the past year.[9]

Some of the most compelling discussions of the project revolve around public engagement. If we need to continue to think about how to cultivate institutional relationships and adoptions (a focus in Maddox's evaluation), we also need to continue to investigate how public engagement around digital public history works "on the ground" in developing nations such as those in East Africa. Nieves and especially Hart offer ideas to explore. Nieves emphasizes engaging members of the public as direct content contributors using the platform. Might a project such as this one remove hurdles to participation and become radically inclusive? The biggest hurdle, as Nieves points out, is the project's administrative controls, namely the story approval procedure in which only admins may

[9] See, for example, Rob Ahearne, "Tanzania's Latest Clampdown Takes Decades of Repression to New Lows," *The Conversation*, May 28, 2018, https://theconversation.com/tanzanias-latest-clampdown-takes-decades-of-repression-to-new-lows-96959.

publish stories. Lowering the bar to contributions might build trust with community members, but it would be a challenge to implement in the context of how we imagined Curatescape more broadly—as a tool that promotes thoroughly researched public history narratives containing curated selections of media from disparate sources. Such content is hard to generate through a hands-off "crowdsourcing" model. With academic institutions as project conveners, policies, standards, and procedures may be necessary safeguards. Our inclination is to spend more time cultivating community stakeholders *before* inviting submissions of content, which gives opportunities to explain and prepare for their possible participation. Hart emphasizes the potential to engage public participation in the project through social media (e.g., uploading their own photos). For many members of the general public, Facebook is a venue where they are more likely to be comfortable sharing content. Our project's Facebook page could potentially generate story "stubs" if we were more active in making our page a venue for this. We might do a better job foregrounding our desire for community participation and submissions but believe it is outside the purview of the publishing platform itself and must instead be rooted in direct contact with the community.

As previously noted, we also invited comment by curator Phoebe Awiti and staff at Kisumu Museum (along with museum visitors). In echo of Hart, Awiti believes the project stories not only generate public interest in Kisumu history but also "make those who feel their stories have not been told to want to tell them." Our project's core principle of lowering barriers to public access to humanities content bypasses traditional societal hierarchies and bureaucracies typically involved when working through institutions, and it also obviates the cost or unavailability of books or articles behind paywalls. Like some of our other evaluators, Awiti thinks the project stories have utility for teachers because they provide "immediate examples that the learners can relate with." The project, she writes, also "helps in the conservation of both intangible and immovable heritage," one of the chief responsibilities of the museum. She adds that *MaCleKi* will "help reinforce" the museum's educational programs. Among the comments by museum staff members, two stand out. One museum volunteer found the stories on *MaCleKi* generally too long. Indeed, the average main story narrative is approximately 1,500 words (with a couple of much longer stories), two to three times the average length on *Cleveland Historical* (the pilot Curatescape project). This reflects our belief that *MaCleKi* has a greater documentary imperative because of the dearth of publicly available historical content about Kisumu. However, it is important to grapple with how best to reconcile the need to document with the need to engage. A second museum volunteer had no complaint about length. The stories inspired him to "realize our value" as a people of "dignity" living in a "rich" land.

Finally, our project partners Gordon Obote Magaga and Benard Busaka and their students also delivered evaluations of their participation in the project. Magaga and Busaka's report points to how the project helped students in "sharpening their writing skills" and how it "provided a platform for them to not only interact closely but also … for making friendship between themselves [and their CSU partners]," adding that it enabled them "to discuss cultures and to appreciate each other" and to build "self confidence." They also value the digital humanities and public history experience they have gained as a result of their involvement in this and the previous grant. Their students, likewise, generally appreciated the opportunity for involvement. They cite the experience they gained as collaborating researchers. One comments that the project "help[ed] me gather a lot of field experience and social interactions." Another expresses satisfaction with "getting to know more about places from other countries" and enjoyed "cooperation with my partners."

Students, however, were not shy about offering critiques. Some found it hard to approach people during their field work. Just as it was sometimes challenging for students to work with each other

across cultures (and time zones), Maseno students occasionally commented on challenges such as an inability to communicate with people in the community who likely possessed pertinent knowledge but "did not understand both Kiswahili and English." A couple encountered some hostility from people during their field work. It is worth reviewing our protocols for the introductions made to facilitate their research in the community, and this is a matter that anyone doing similar work must vigilantly review and modify as necessary. Other students found the timeline for research too compressed. This was an unfortunate result of the fact that Maseno's semesters typically began two to three weeks after CSU's had commenced, creating a lag that was overcome only at the expense of sufficient time for research on the Maseno side. This issue unquestionably limited the robustness of content development but was unavoidable. It is also one that would likely affect most efforts to coordinate student research involving institutions in two or more countries. Working with the Kisumu Museum partially mitigated the problem by introducing additional materials and insights at a critical point in each semester. Other students felt that the funds provided (by CPHDH, outside the grant) were not wholly sufficient, though others expressed satisfaction with the level of support for travel expenses. It is worth mentioning that the above-noted challenges and complexities are not demonstrably different from those that attend digital public history projects in general.

Continuation of the Project

We plan to continue the project following the grant period. We agreed to take a semester hiatus from new content creation in spring 2019 for the purposes of reflecting, reporting on, and publicizing the project. We expect to resume content creation in fall 2019 and, in the meantime, to encourage public submissions of content, especially through social media.

We will also explore forming a broader project team that spans more of East Africa to fulfill the promise of developing and sustaining a digital project of wider import in the region. We hope to gain more insight into the range of issues and challenges that may present themselves as we move beyond the known experience of our partners at Maseno University. In the process of the work done thus far, we have begun to identify some potential partner institutions and will explore funding opportunities to scale up the project. To that end, the International Public History Federation (IPHF), an affiliate of the National Council on Public History (NCPH), has offered to work with us to spread the word and find potential collaborators. CPHDH and the project team plan to consult freely with those who would like to implement projects using this open-source tool. We do not currently envision rolling the WordPress version of Curatescape into our mobile app licensing. Our thinking is that Omeka will remain the preferred platform for Curatescape projects that do not require low data consumption and/or require extraordinary budgetary constraints. We are committed to continuing to support and iteratively improve the plugin in the hope of seeing it reach its fullest potential to encourage digital storytelling in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.

Since the close of the grant, we have also already begun an important, originally unforeseen next step in development. While we had expected to be in a position for broad dissemination of the project and encouragement of wide adoption, an important technological change has prompted reconsideration of our timing. We anticipate the need for substantial additional development in light of recent changes to WordPress, as well as changes to our own plans for ongoing development of Curatescape for WordPress. WordPress has been a very stable development platform for many years, but the inclusion of the "Project Gutenberg" block editor (in version 5.0, released in December 2018) marked the beginning of a major transition, the contours of which are still developing. Because the block editor is new and its eventual form still a matter of some debate in

the WordPress community, we have revised our roadmap to account for the significant resources it will take to make a complete transition. At present, we are relying on the built-in backward compatibility mode (allowing us to use the older content editor interface), which is fully supported by WordPress, but which we expect will be deprecated in the future. As such, we have undertaken a rewrite of the Curatescape for WordPress plugin that makes full use of the new editor and matches the evolving platform conventions.

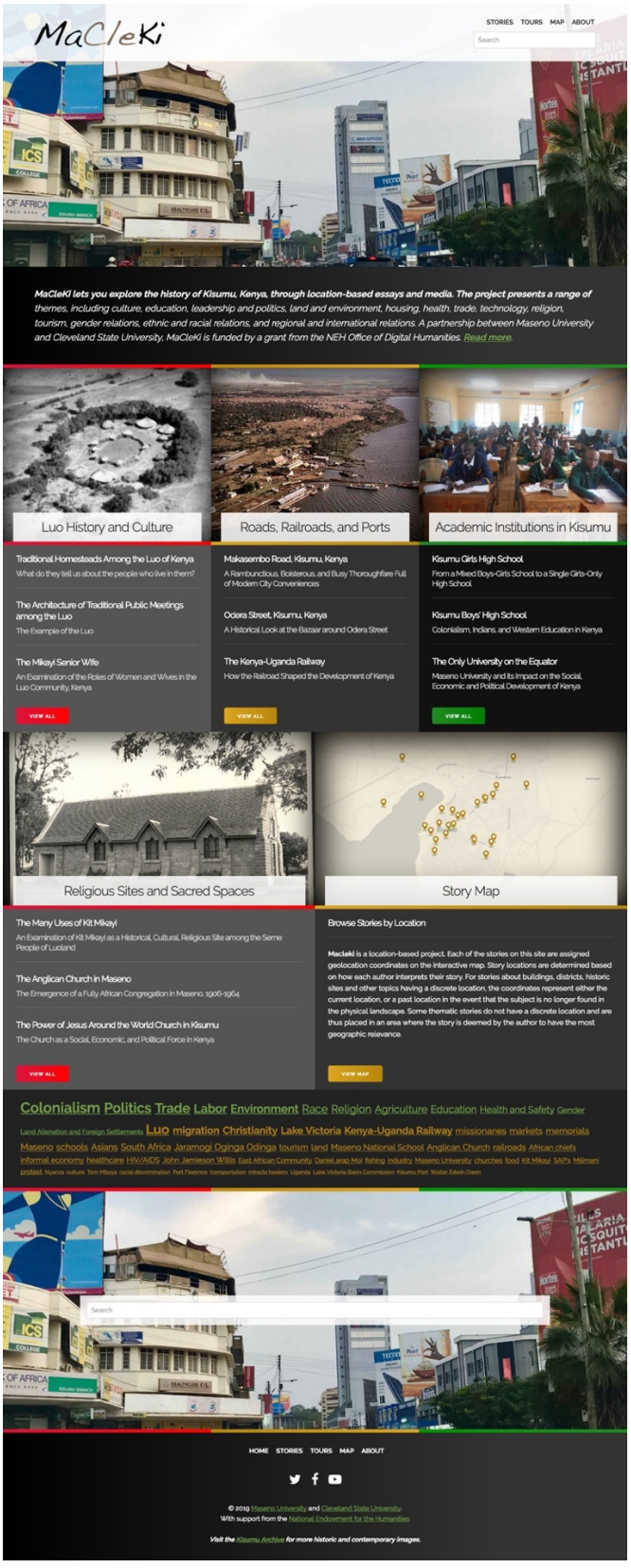
We also envision some important conceptual changes that will clarify our value proposition within the WordPress community and make a clean break from the Omeka version, whose form has been influenced by that platform in ways that don't necessarily translate well to WordPress. First, we intend to change the name of the Curatescape for WordPress plugin to PlacePress. This will allow us to create a marketing presence for the project that avoids confusion with the Omeka-based product. PlacePress will retain the focus on building tours but will drop the "stories" label in favor of "locations." Locations will be functionally similar to "stories" but with some important distinctions. The most notable differences are the planned removal of custom typographic elements (i.e. subtitles and ledes), custom media galleries, and custom citation management. In each case, WordPress users have a variety of equivalent first- and third-party options for managing these tasks. Narrowing our focus in this way will allow us to build a more appropriate tool for WordPress users while avoiding time spent on "out of scope" details that were originally designed to make Omeka a better platform for storytelling. PlacePress will continue to provide options for detailed location metadata and tour-building and will continue to work with any modern WordPress theme, offering a documented API for additional customization. With these revised features, we believe PlacePress will be more sustainable and will find an audience among researchers interested in documenting place, including historians, and humanists and social scientists, urban planners, tourism professionals, and others. Development of PlacePress is already underway, with a formal release and marketing website scheduled for 2019.[10] (See Appendix C.)

Long Term Impact

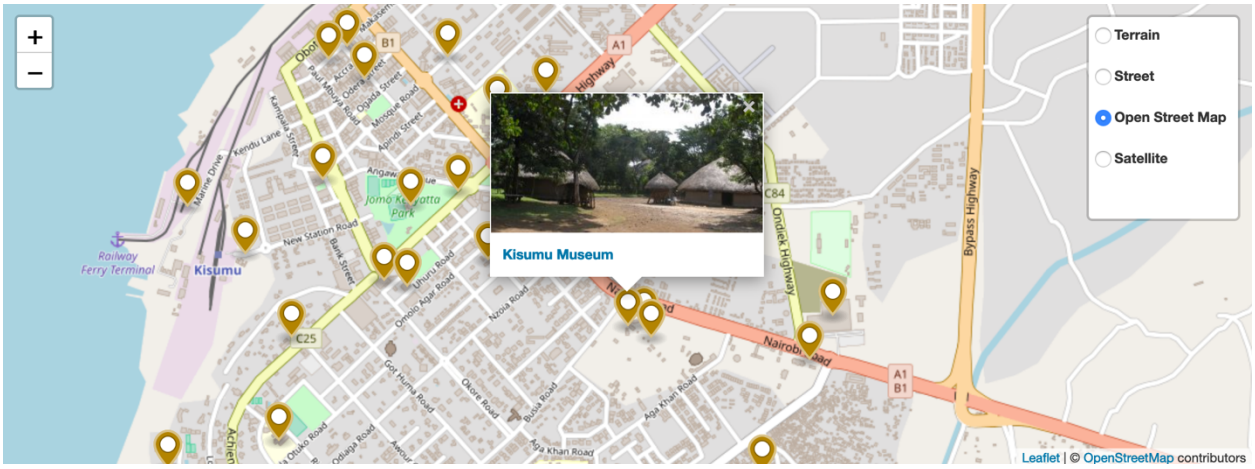
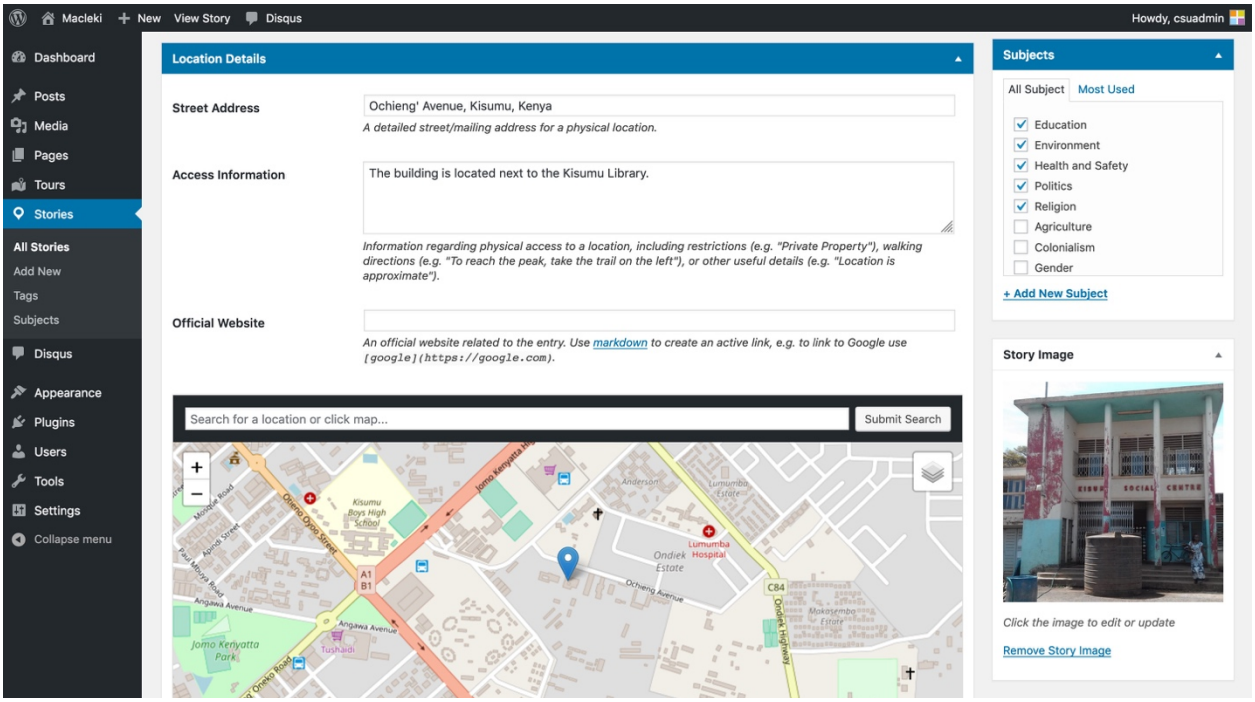
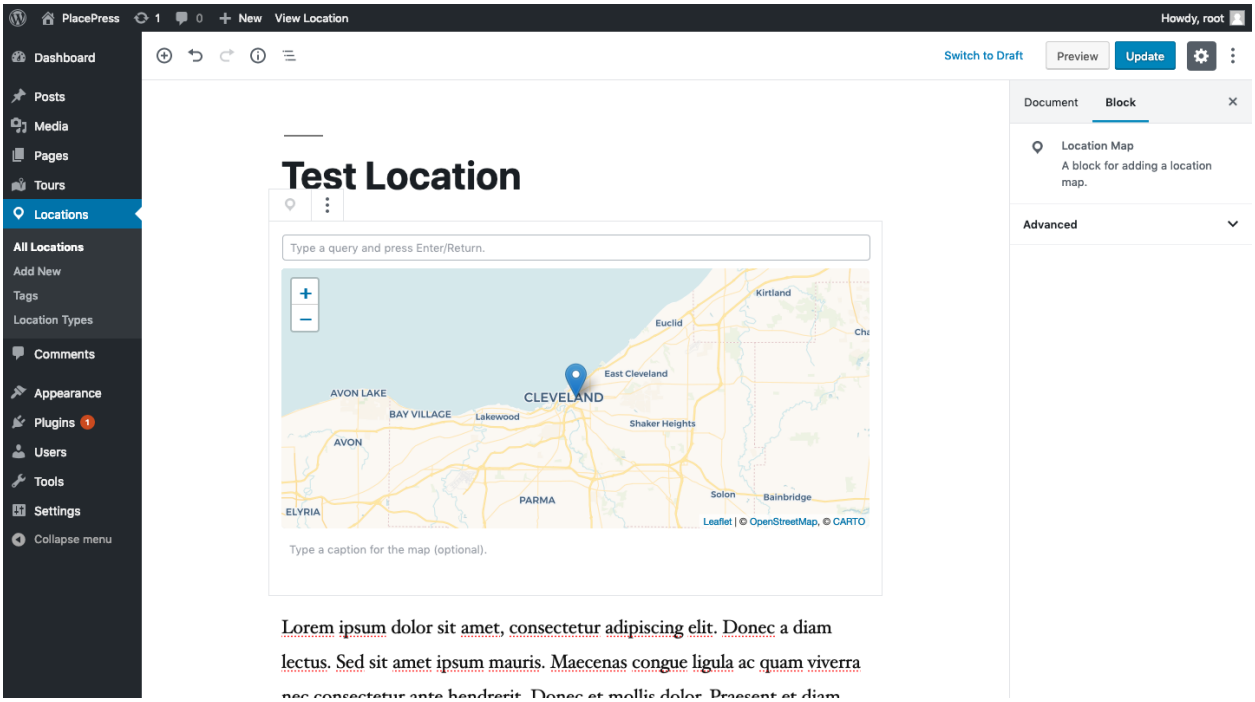
The project's greatest impacts include (after continued development) PlacePress, a toolset for location-based digital storytelling that is highly accessible and appropriate for developing-world contexts, as well as a continually expanding, public-facing online history of an African city, one will continue to engage everyday people in developing a strong sense of place. *MaCleKi* offers a model for producing urban histories of African cities that circumvent the usual hurdles for dissemination of such knowledge in the region. *MaCleKi* draws from the wellspring of oral tradition and lived experience, as well as from humanistic scholarship. By noted by some of our project evaluators, there is great potential for the website to inform secondary education by providing materials for teachers to connect local topics to national and global themes. Another important contribution is this project's utility as a vehicle for advocacy for preserving historically significant buildings or sites or at least documenting them when they cannot be saved at a time when Kenyans, like their counterparts in other parts of the developing world, are clamoring for more modern urban environments. Our greatest hope is that PlacePress will facilitate others' ability to undertake similar work elsewhere, whether individually or in collaboration with our project team.

[10] *PlacePress*, http://wpplacepress.org; *PlacePress* on GitHub, https://github.com/CPHDH/placepress.

Appendix A. *MaCleKi* landing page following redesign in response to evaluators



Appendix B. *MaCleKi* story map



Appendix C. Differences between Curatescape for WP and PlacePress interfaces